

Tajuk : Japan gives UNIMAS RM350,000 to help Penan settlement

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KUCHING: Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) has secured its fourth Japanese Government grant to expand and extend several rural Information Communication Technology projects in the state's interior.

The latest Japanese donation of RM350,000 will benefit a Penan settlement of 500 residents near the Sarawak-Kalimantan border, about nine hours from the nearest city of Miri by boats and 4WD vehicles.

The grant, which was handed over to the university yesterday, bring the total amount of Japanese donations to Sarawak to about

RM2.4mil over the years. Since 1996, the Japanese have carried out Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) in Sarawak. The programme sponsors a number of quality of life improving projects undertaken by non-governmental bodies.

Since 1989, Japan has contributed RM14mil to 125 projects in Malaysia. The only institute of higher learning under the GGP's collaborations in Malaysia is with Unimas.

"In the development of Japan, our Government recognises the difficult task of bridging the rural-urban gap," said Koichi Ito,

Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Japan in Malaysia.

"Levelling out the rural-urban gap is a great challenge. In Japan, great efforts have been concentrated in rural towns and villages. Our goals are always to marry development with traditions and respect for the environment," Ito said.

He added the GGP's guiding principal was on empowering local communities. On its latest grant for Sarawak, he said the funds would be used to build a mini hydro electric dam and a meeting room in Long Lamai.

The electricity generated will provide free,

clean and renewable energy to the entire settlement, including a computer lab.

Speaking at the donation handing-over ceremony, Ito noted that this year was the 30th anniversary of Malaysia's Look East Policy, initiated by ex-Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, which promoted Japan's development as a model to emulate.

Ito said Malaysia-Japan relations had never waned. "I would also like to take the opportunity to thank all Sarawakians for your care and help during the Japanese earthquake. This Sunday will be the first anniversary."